

**Saudi, Mona. Interviewed 2012. Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.<sup>1</sup>**

We were a group of Arab artists brought together in the 1960s and 1970s by our desire to establish a new original form of Arab art of our region.

Most of these artists worked together, and held joint activities, exhibitions and meetings. Some of the most prominent among them were the Syrian artists Abdel Qader Aranaout and Nadhir Naba'ah, who by the way was one of the first artists to create posters for Palestine, in addition to his other artwork. Other prominent artists include the Iraqi artists Ismail Fattah and Kamal Dia Azzawi, who played a very important role. We all inspired each other in this group. One of the artists who helped me with the plastic art exhibition for Palestine in 1978 was Dia Azzawi. The following year, Dia called for an international poster competition about not only the Palestinian revolution, but also all 'third world' revolutions. All the posters in the competition were exhibited in London and Baghdad, and a very important booklet was produced. This exhibition brought together a big group of artists who expressed their support for the Palestinian cause. Maybe the most beautiful thing about art was that it gave people new ideas and inspiration to continue the work. In my work, I have a strong relationship to poetry. The children's book [*In Time of War*] contains a lot of the children's words, but it also contains segments of poetry, segments by poets who wrote in the spirit of the age.

For example, is in this page there is a poem written by Adonis. He says:

*Come forth, poor of our earth  
Cover this age with names and tears  
Give it the body searching for its warmth  
The city is arches of madness  
I saw the revolution bearing its sons  
I buried millions of songs and arrived*

I felt these segments of poetry - and poetry in general - to be an extension of the human spirit. Let me see what else was there. Adonis also wrote this segment. I will try and read it.

*The revolution is the colour and its arc  
When will the ashes of the universe awaken this sleeping age?*

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*Into a lake of ice silent like a nail  
Empty it like an urn  
Give it to the fire  
For the rising age  
From the years of the generations  
Under the feet of the children  
Who sows the seeds of purity?  
Who carries the light and the spark?*

All of this expressed the spirit of the age. I also borrowed a short segment from Muzaffar al-Nawab. He says:

*I don't have a house where I can take off my tiredness,  
But I'm like the lightning promising the land  
That rain is coming.  
It will wash from our paintings all the houses of the vanquished  
It will wash with warm rain the wings of the seagulls  
And the houses of our loved ones, and the first letter of my alphabet*

In addition to borrowing poetry for this book, I painted many paintings for Mahmoud Darwish's poems (I think the painting behind me is one of these paintings). One such painting was inspired by Mahmoud Darwish's poem on Land Day, which he wrote following the Land Day incidents in Palestine. As a result of my attachment to the idea of land, when I heard of the Intifada led by 1948 Palestinians, I felt that the original concept still held. I was deeply affected by the idea Mahmoud Darwish expressed in 'To Our Land'. Another one of my paintings was inspired by his poem 'The Green'. Some of my other paintings were inspired by poems written by other poets, such as Adonis. Beirut at that time was the free zone of the Arab world; Beirut brought together all the creative Arabs, politicians exiled from their own countries, poets and artists. At that time, if an artist wanted to become famous, he would exhibit his works in Beirut. Beirut was the testing ground for Arab culture. Of course, culture cannot grow without an atmosphere of freedom. Luckily there was a place that enjoyed such freedom, despite all the painful wars, and painful events, that took and still take place in Beirut. There was a wide margin for freedom of expression. One would be afraid to express their opinions freely in any other Arab country, but not in Beirut. In Beirut, you could express your opinion anywhere you liked. I don't know what will happen in the future. Of course life goes on, and we will carry on with this creative cultural work. It is the water that keeps us alive and gives hope despite everything.